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All That Brass

Colleagues Rally Round Westmoreland

By Carla Hall

"You're seeing a lot of brass here," said retired Army Lt. Gen. Daniel Graham with a chuckle. "Antique brass."

Last night they turned out to honor Gen. William Westmoreland, and most could formally be addressed by the same title—General.

"You say the word 'General' in here," said Rosalee Trudeau, who is married to one, "and you'd have an awful lot of people run."

But you didn't hear it much, because no one was addressing anyone else formally. They were "Danny" and "Westie." This was a gathering of military friends, the once-elite of the corps, most having retired their uniforms for pin-striped suits.

"They make us retire before we want to," said retired general Frank Camm over the buffet. "They want to make sure people are young enough to lead the next war."

They grew up together, achieved power together and now—although

this was a social gathering, the hosts stressed—they easily rose to defend one of their own, Westmoreland—a "soldier's soldier," one general called him—in his \$120 million suit against CBS. The libel suit contends that a CBS network broadcast falsely accused Westmoreland of deliberately underestimating enemy troop strength in Vietnam.

"He should win it," said Camm, who was an 11-year-old Army brat at Fort Bragg when he first caught a glimpse of a young Westmoreland. "I was in Vietnam. I know very well that this man would never do a thing like this. He's loyal to this country."

Another of Westmoreland's strong supporters is Graham, who was an intelligence officer in Saigon and later was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency.

"It's absolutely amazing," said Westmoreland of the reaction to his suit, filed in September. "I'm getting mail and getting checks for \$5 and \$10 and \$15 through the mail. I never solicited any money. I give it to the Capital Legal Foundation [a conservative, public-interest law firm representing Westmoreland.] My mail has been running 99 percent in my favor."

Will he win the suit, he was asked.

He shrugged. "If there's justice in our society, and facts and truth are meaningful," he said with a smile, "I can come to no other conclusion."

The government affairs consulting firm of Alcalde, Henderson and O'Bannon gave the small reception in honor of Westmoreland, who joined the firm earlier this year as a senior consultant. Westmoreland, who lives in Charleston, S.C., comes to Washington once or twice a month and maintains an office at the firm.

"He's a longtime friend of mine," said David Henderson, of the firm.

"He served on a couple of boards with me." One of those was the board of the Fiscal Policy Council, a think-tank in Riviera Beach, Fla., for which Henderson's firm has worked. As for the work Westmoreland will do, Henderson said, "That's not quite specified."

Westmoreland added that he could be helpful "if I can discuss [issues] from time to time with friends on the Hill."

More than 100 guests roamed the suite of thick-carpeted offices with windows overlooking a blackened expanse of night sky and Rosslyn traffic 12 stories below. In addition to military types, guests included two of Westmoreland's lawyers, a few members of Congress and Charles MacDonald, the retired Army historian who helped Westmoreland with his memoirs.

When Dan Burt, Westmoreland's lawyer from the Capital Legal Foundation, flagged a policeman for directions to the Rosslyn office building last night, he said the policeman had a question. "He said, 'Are you going to that reception for Gen. Westmoreland?'" Burt related. "He said, 'Tell him to knock their socks off.'" Burt laughed with delight. "Dynamite!"

There was some reminiscing last night, too.

"We were both Army brats," said Scotty Armstrong, the widow of Col. Cecil Strong, as she chatted with Kitsy Westmoreland, her friend since childhood, who is the wife of Gen. Westmoreland. "Our daddies were horse artillerymen. Westie was a horse artilleryman. They used to have horses pull the artillery." She looked around the room. "They're a lot of horse artillerymen here."

"We grew up at Fort Bragg," said Armstrong, chuckling. "We were brides at Fort Bragg, and we certainly grew up then."